

STATINTL

Heavy N. Viet Civilian Death Toll Disclosed

By MORTON KONDRACK and THOMAS B. ROSS

WASHINGTON — (CST) — The top-secret Pentagon papers show the Johnson administration was receiving intelligence estimates of heavy civilian casualties in the bombing of North Vietnam at the same time in 1967 that it was publicly denouncing such reports as exaggerations.

The New York Times disclosed in its editions Saturday that the Central Intelligence Agency estimated in January 1967, that the toll of dead and wounded from the air war rose from 13,000 in 1965 to 23-24,000 in 1966 — "about 80 per cent civilians."

The Times also quoted the Pentagon study as concluding the air raids inside a previously off-limits area around Hanoi in the first two weeks of December 1966, "undercut what appeared to be a peace feeler" from North Vietnam.

THE STUDY alluded to "an explosive debate about the bombing" provoked by eyewitness reports from North Vietnam by Harrison Salisbury of the New York Times and William Baggs of the Miami News.

Their dispatches were publicly criticized by the Pentagon as inaccurate and exaggerated. But the Pentagon study declares that their estimates of civilian casualties were much lower than the CIA's.

Both the Times and the Washington Post carried long installments of the study but most of it has already appeared on the Chicago Daily News-Sun-Times wire.

In the first disclosures on the administration of President Harry S. Truman, the Post indicates that officials then debated whether to treat Ho Chi Minh as a Vietnamese version of Tito, the independent Communist leader of Yugoslavia.

IN THE END, however, it was decided to treat him as a "Stalinist" and to aid France in recapturing its pre-war Indochina colony.

Despite one request from Ho Chi Minh that Vietnam be accorded the status of the Philippines and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's expressed hope of securing Vietnam's independence from France, the Truman administration committed \$10 million in military assistance to France in May 1950.

That was less than the \$100 million recommended by the joint chiefs of staff.

The Times installment recounts the shift of Defense Sec. Robert S. McNamara from hawk to dove, starting in October, 1966. It retells the story of how McNamara then tried to get President Lyndon B. Johnson to cut back the bombing of North Vietnam — 17 months before Johnson finally took the step.

THE TIMES also quotes from a McNamara memo of May, 1967, proposing that the administration "scale down" its objectives in Vietnam and seek a political compromise with the Vietcong.

"Our commitment," McNamara suggested, "is only to see that the people of South Vietnam are permitted to determine their own future . . . this commitment ceases if the country ceases to help itself . . .

"Nor do we have an obligation to pour in effort out of proportion to the effort contributed by the people of South Vietnam, or in the face of coups, corruption, apathy or other indications of Saigon's failure to co-operate satisfactorily with us."

The Pentagon study reveals, according to the Times version, that Johnson gave his first "no" to a troop request by the military on Nov. 11, 1966.

GEN. WILLIAM C. Westmoreland, the U. S. commander in Vietnam, was informed that the ceiling would be 460,000, more than 100,000 less than he proposed.

Without explanation, the study declares that the air raids that "undercut" the peace feeler were "launched inadvertently."

The Polish member of the International Control Commission was trying to arrange talks between the United States and North Vietnamese officials in Warsaw. But the study notes:

"The attempt to start talks ran into difficulty. A belated attempt to mollify North Vietnam's bruised ego failed and formal talks did not materialize."

The Washington Post quoted the Pentagon history as describing President Truman's \$10 million grant in aid to France as the first grant in aid to France as the first "crucial decision regarding U. S. military involvement in Indochina."

BY THE TIME Ho Chi Minh had defeated France at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accords were signed in July, 1954, the United States had delivered \$2.6 billion in aid to Indochina, according to the Pentagon summary.

This was in addition to budgetary support to France, which also ran into the billions.

The aid was an early U. S. expression of belief in what was to be known later as the "domino theory" — that Indochina was a "test" of power between Soviet-directed Communists and the forces of the West.

While the Truman administration said it wanted France to give Indochina its independence eventually, a National Security Council report at the end of 1950 stated:

"The United States should take action, as a matter of urgency, by all means practicable, short of the actual employment of U. S. military forces, to deny Indochina to Communism."